WEST PORTAL/ST. FRANCIS CIRCLE PLAN

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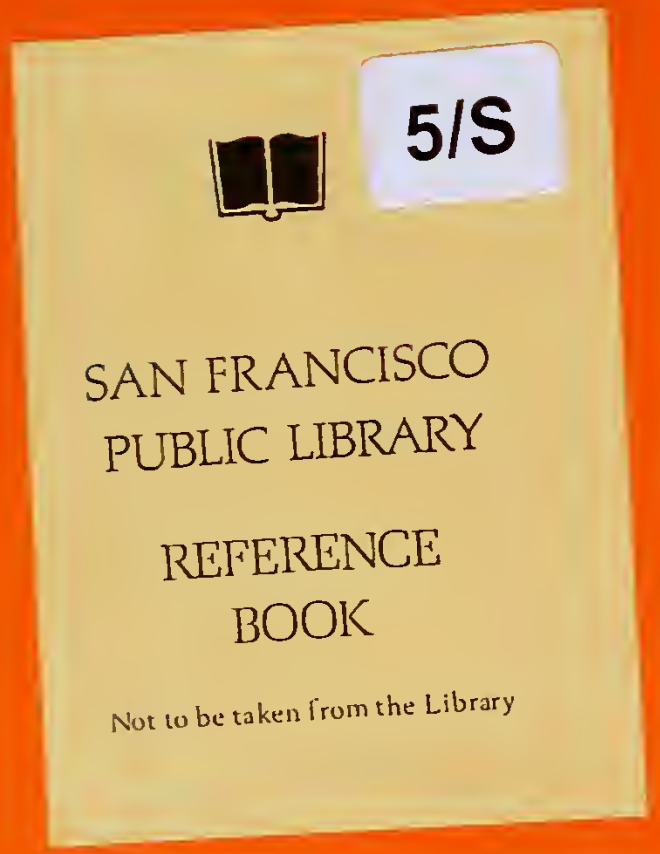
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SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared for
the San Francisco Department of City Planning

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April 15, 1971

Mr. Allan B. Jacobs, Director
Department of City Planning
100 Larkin Street
San Francisco, California

Dear Mr. Jacobs:

It is with great pleasure we submit the West Portal/ St. Francis Circle Plan, representing the completion of our contract with the San Francisco Planning Commission.

The plans in this report are based on a study of the West Portal area and represent an attempt to fulfill its unusual potential. We look forward to the possibility of carrying these schematic plans through to completion.

In addition to the continuing cooperation of the Department of City Planning, we want to also thank the Department of Public Works, especially the Traffic Engineering Division of that department. The Municipal Railway and the Recreation and Park Department have also been very helpful. The West Portal Merchants Association were and will continue to be a vital component in the planning effort. The A.I.A. study, initiated by Supervisor Barbagelata also provided helpful material.

Sincerely,

Piero N. Patri, A.I.A.
WHISLER-PATRI

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West Portal/St. Francis Circle plan : summary
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INTRODUCTION

The proposed rebuilding of the West Portal Transit Station and the St. Francis Circle intersection presents an opportunity to make the West Portal area a more livable, more attractive and more workable environment. It is the objective of this plan to take advantage of this opportunity.

Once approved, it will function as a general guide to the various city departments and BARTD as detailed studies progress.

History

In 1917, the Twin Peaks Tunnel was completed, stimulating the beginning of the West Portal Avenue commercial area.

The commercial area grew steadily until the late 1940's when the nearby Stonestown Shopping Center was completed and had a negative impact on West Portal. Subsequently, the area regained its stature as a fine local shopping area with a variety of retail and supporting service businesses.

In 1962, the BARTD bond issue proposal, including a transit subway under West Portal Avenue, was approved by the voters.

Subsequently, in 1968, the City Planning Commission approved and contracted to develop urban design plans for the West Portal Avenue Transit Station.

Because of concern expressed by the West Portal merchants regarding construction disruption, the Board of Supervisors voted to maintain the streetcar tracks on the surface of the street. This study was revised to accommodate this decision as well as to incorporate improvement plans for St. Francis Circle.

During the re-evaluation period, a sketch study for the street was prepared under the auspices of the American Institute of Architects.

In addition to the A.I.A. study, informal meetings with merchants and residents were held as a basis for evaluating and guiding this plan.

View of
West Portal Station area

EXISTING CONDITIONS

WEST PORTAL AREA

Uses

The West Portal shopping area is the key component in the commercial, recreational and educational corridor that extends from the Taraval-Claremont Circle to St. Francis Circle. In addition to the shopping area, the corridor includes an elementary school, park, branch library, and transit station, as well as churches and other institutions. The corridor is clearly the activity focus of the surrounding residential area.

Shopping facilities along West Portal Avenue appear healthy, active and varied, with an emphasis on service and quality. The existence of apartment units above and adjacent to the commercial area add both daytime and evening activity.

The compact commercial spine on West Portal Avenue is surrounded by a single family residential area that is well maintained and appears to be stable in occupancy as well as value.

Circulation and Parking

Automobile traffic along West Portal Avenue is primarily shopping-oriented. Little through traffic finds its way to West Portal Avenue.

There is adequate space in the one-hundred foot right-of-way for the existing elements -- two twelve foot sidewalks, diagonal parking on both sides of the street, a traffic lane in each direction, two pair of tracks and a four foot median. The track lane allows for moving traffic to by-pass temporarily double parked vehicles.

The taxi loading zone at the portal is active. Some "kiss-ride" transfers of auto passengers also take place at the portal during peak hours.

The K, L and M streetcars and the Number 17 bus now operating on West Portal Avenue are quite compatible

with the commercial uses. Streetcars stop at the portal and then proceed to the central business district. Bus Number 17 makes its final stop at the portal before reversing its route.

In addition to the diagonal parking on both sides of West Portal Avenue, the area is served by two public neighborhood parking areas, one with twenty-four spaces and one with twenty spaces.

Urban Design Character

The portal, a strong monolithic concrete form accented by the large trees flanking it, is an important urban design element. Unfortunately, its potential impact is presently diminished by the clutter surrounding it. Additionally, the portal cuts off the view of the park behind it.

Although the commercial structures are in good condition, the appearance of the entire street is not especially distinguished.

A design theme that relates individual buildings is not evident. The existing sidewalks tend to be dull and the small trees along the street, while pleasant, are not significant additions.

The median and related light standard/streetcar wire supports, although they need redesign, serve to give the street some interest.

ST. FRANCIS CIRCLE

Uses

St. Francis Circle land use is limited to residential uses with single family detached homes, except for an undeveloped parcel on which Pacific Telephone and Telegraph proposes to build an operator's exchange building.

Circulation

The volume of automobile traffic on Sloat Boulevard, Junipero Serra Boulevard and Portola Drive through the intersection is relatively high and, due to the

View of West Portal Avenue at Vicente Street

View of St. Francis Circle from Sloat Boulevard

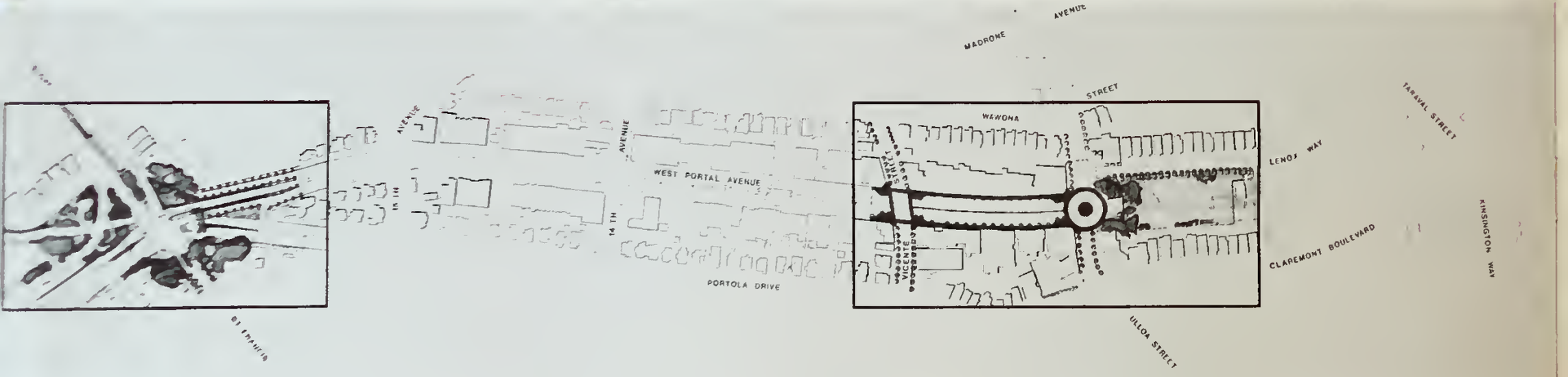
movement patterns, is congested during peak hours. Additional traffic volume in this complex intersection comes from St. Francis Boulevard and West Portal Avenue. The K and M streetcars and Number 17, 18 and 28 buses add to the congestion.

The recently approved conditional use of the operator's exchange building at the corner of West Portal Avenue and Sloat Boulevard will further aggravate the problem.

Urban Design Character

Both the adjacent public spaces and the nearby single detached homes are well landscaped, including several clusters of large evergreen trees. The intersection itself, however, is undefined and is characterized by too much paving and not enough landscaping.

General plan of West Portal area showing specific study areas



THE PLAN

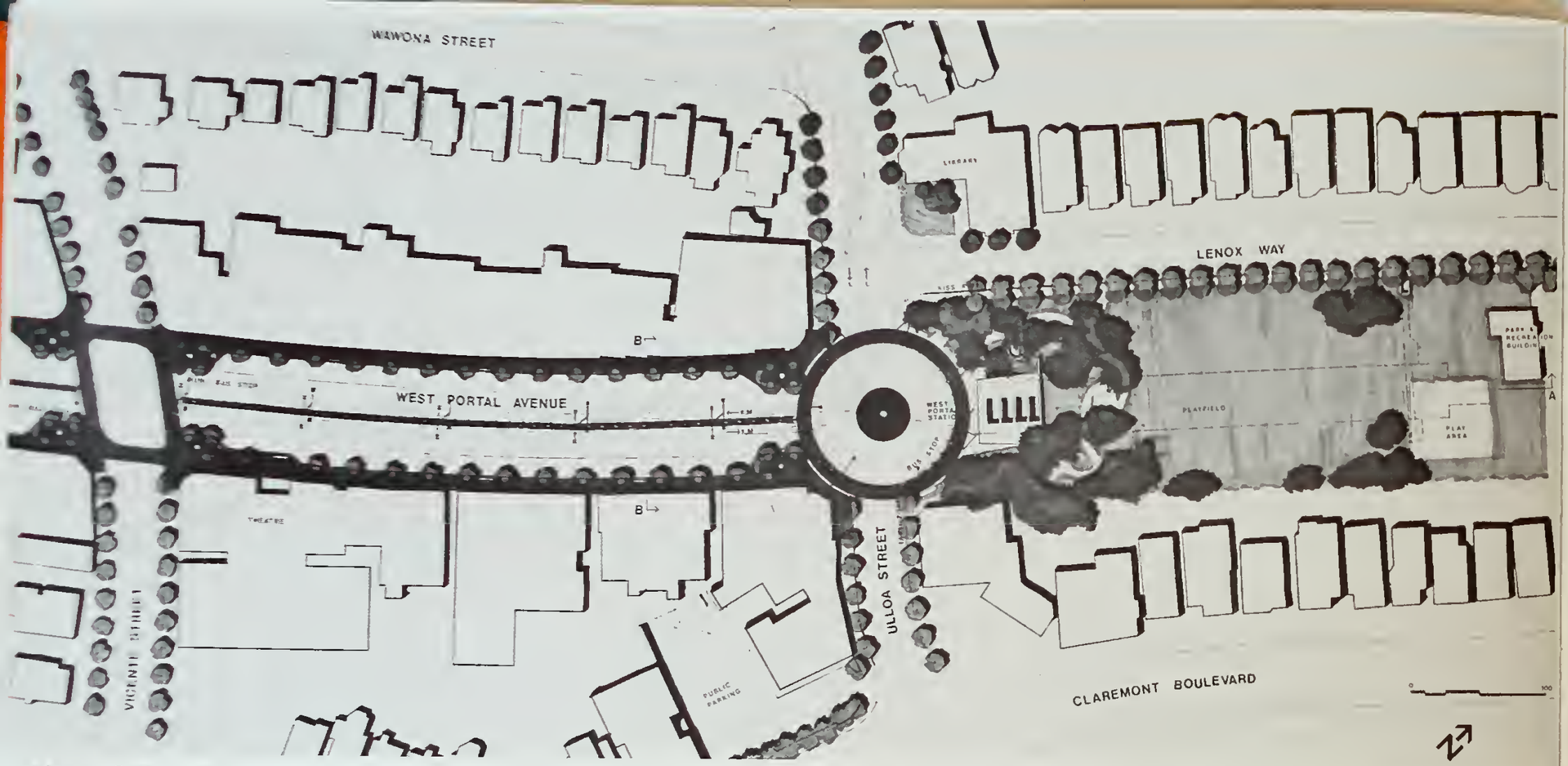
The basic planning concept is to create a landscaped "green belt" which will include the park -- expanded to embrace the West Portal Transit Station -- extend the full length of West Portal Avenue with street trees, and terminate in a series of landscaped mounds and tree clusters at St. Francis Circle.

The "green belt" will be re-inforced by decorative paving, street furniture and an integrated lighting system beginning at the station entry, and extending as a spine down the center of West Portal Avenue, terminating at St. Francis Circle.

WEST PORTAL STATION AREA

In order to create a transit gateway to the West Portal area as well as a focal point for the West Portal shopping area, the following changes are proposed:

- The existing West Portal Park will extend down to Ulloa Street, making it visually and physically more accessible from the West Portal shopping area.
- The leveled playfield will be terminated by a landscaped berm, topped with a view plaza which will be linked by a path down the gently sloping face of the berm to the transit station portal at Ulloa Street.
- A sitting plaza and tot-lot will be located nearby.
- A double row of trees will be planted at the sidewalk along the edge of the park to improve the link with the recreation building and school facilities.
- At the station portal itself, the Municipal Railway will change from an underground to aboveground operation.
- The end of the tunnel will be treated as a sculptured cantilevered roof protecting the loading platform.
- The portal will include a wind-protected bus stop and information center as well as appropriate furniture.



Plan of West Portal Station area

Longitudinal section through West Portal Station area

- The present Muni service facilities will be redesigned and located to a less prominent location.

- The abutting intersection of West Portal Avenue and Ulloa Street, including a paved circular crosswalk with a circle of street lights overhead, is proposed to link more strongly the transit station with the shopping area and further define the termination of West Portal Avenue.

- Bus loading space will be provided as well as a taxicab waiting zone and a "kiss-ride" zone.

WEST PORTAL AVENUE

To create a more unique, attractive and functional neighborhood shopping area, these changes are proposed:

- The sidewalks will remain twelve feet wide except at the corners where they will be widened to approximately twenty-six feet to include street furniture such as informational kiosks, benches, pedestrian lights, trash containers, newspaper racks and flower planting tubs.

- Bollards will punctuate the intersections and low walls will define sitting areas.

- The sidewalk will be finished with a warm decorative paving where possible.

- Evergreen flowering street trees will be planted at approximately twenty-eight foot centers.

- A median of decorative paving and bollards will be maintained between opposing streetcar tracks to discourage excessive jaywalking and for pedestrian safety.

- The streetcar wire and street light dual purpose poles will be designed so they can be utilized for temporary decorative displays and flags on special occasions.

Cross section of
West Portal Avenue

SECTION BB

ST. FRANCIS CIRCLE

To create a vehicular gateway to the West Portal area which is comprehensible as well as attractive, the following changes are proposed:

- Additional conifer trees as well as turf mounds will be utilized extensively to define the intersection as well as to reinforce and continue the "green belt" concept.

- A ring of lights similar to those at West Portal Circle will further define the intersection and terminate the central spine of lights beginning at West Portal Circle.

- A sculptural element is proposed to identify the entry to West Portal Avenue.

- The automobile portals are sculptured to emphasize their location.

- Pedestrian walkways are proposed to be parklike in character.

- Wherever possible, street pavement area is reduced to a minimum to provide additional landscaped area.

- Southwestbound traffic on Portola Drive will be handled by a two-lane vehicular underpass dividing under the intersection, with one lane leading to Sloat Boulevard, the other to Junipero Serra Boulevard.

- In order to further simplify traffic problems, southwestbound traffic on West Portal Avenue will turn right on Sloat Boulevard. Traffic destined for Junipero Serra Boulevard will turn left at 15th Avenue, right at Portola Drive and proceed through the tunnel.

- St. Francis Station, just to the north of the Circle, will receive the same pedestrian amenities, such as street furniture, as is proposed for West Portal Avenue.

Plan of St. Francis Circle

Cross section through St. Francis Circle

IMPLEMENTATION

PUBLIC ACTION

In order to implement this plan, approval by the City Planning Commission must be obtained. The plan will then be referred to the Department of Public Works who will follow through with necessary further detailing. Negotiation between the City and BARTD to allocate financial responsibilities is necessary. Finally, detailed preliminary designs and construction drawings will be prepared under contract with the Department of Public Works and the construction contract will be let.

FINANCING

The West Portal Station area urban design construction is to be financed as a result of the Market Street Bond Issue, where approximately $200,000 was allocated for the West Portal Station including West Portal Avenue between Ulloa Street and Vicente Street. Beautification of the remaining portion of West Portal Avenue would be presumably funded from other sources. It is proposed to finance the St. Francis Circle construction with gas tax funds.

PRIVATE ACTION

The full impact of the proposed public investment in the area will only be felt if parallel private investment is also made. Merchants and property owners should consider rehabilitation of storefronts, including signing with a design theme. In addition, a merchant-sponsored program for outdoor displays, flags and decroation as well as street and sidewalk cleaning and maintenance is suggested.

Thus the excellence of the commercial activities and surrounding residential area will be matched by the enhanced visual character of both West Portal Avenue and the shops facing it.

WEST PORTAL/ST. FRANCIS CIRCLE PLAN